

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

November 5, 2007

Commissioner-Elect Mike Strain  
Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry  
19607 Highway 36  
Covington, LA 70433

Dear Commissioner-Elect Strain,

Congratulations on your election to Louisiana's Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner. As you already know, this position is vitally important to endorse the industry of agriculture – a growth industry which provides over \$13 billion to the Louisiana economy. I am a proud supporter of Louisiana agriculture and I look forward to working with you in the future to establish policies that support Louisiana agriculture and forestry.

Currently, the Senate is considering S. 2303, Food and Energy Security Act of 2007. This bill, more commonly known as the Farm Bill, re-authorizes agriculture programs through the year 2012. This comprehensive bill totals \$283 billion and tackles various issues involving commodity payments to support our domestic producers, conservation and nutrition programs, rural development matters, research, energy etc. I have several priorities that I have been working on with my colleagues here in the United States Senate and I wanted to share these with you. Some of these provisions have already been agreed to by the Senate Agriculture Committee and I am hopeful that the remaining will be included in the final Senate bill.

These provisions, at my request, are already included in the Senate Farm Bill:

- Maintaining the current sugar program by preserving the Secretary of Agriculture's flexibility in setting the quota for imports and providing additional security by increasing the government-backed loan rate for the sugar program from 18 cents to 19 cents per pound. Despite dramatic surges in energy and equipment costs, the last time the loan rate was increased was in 1985.
- Ensuring a strong commodity title by not placing restrictive limitations on the amount of direct and counter-cyclical payments a farmer can receive. Unfortunately, there is an amendment offered by Senator Grassley that would place a cap on the amount of federal dollars a farmer can receive that is well below current law. I am ready to oppose this amendment on the Senate floor and ensure our cotton, rice, soybean, wheat and corn farmers continue to have an adequate safety net.

- Amending the accounting method that the Risk Management Agency used for determining sweet potato yields for the years 2005-2006. This language fixes a flawed accounting method that left our sweet potato producers ineligible for disaster assistance.
- Language requesting the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to expeditiously approve the oyster crop insurance pilot program to provide relief to oyster farmers in the case of future catastrophic losses.
- Expansion of the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to improve nutrition in school meals.
- Establish separate loan rates for long-grain and medium/short-grain rice. The current loan rates unfairly penalize producers of long-grain rice, much of which is farmed in the South.

This Farm Bill is already a strong bill for Louisiana, but we can make it stronger - on the Senate floor I plan to offer the following amendments:

- A \$30 million authorization over five years for grants that will improve emergency medical services in rural areas and pay for training in firefighting, emergency medical practices and responding to hazardous materials and bioagents. Many rural areas in Louisiana and around the country simply do not have the tax base to afford adequate firefighting and other emergency response resources.
- I will also advocate for lifting the current ban on the sale of baby turtles in the United States. In 1975, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned turtle farmers from selling turtle eggs and turtles fewer than four inches in length to protect pet owners from salmonella, the result of which crippled the turtle farming industry in Louisiana and Mississippi. The regulation has become outdated because scientists at Louisiana State University have developed a method for making the turtles salmonella free. This amendment greatly helps the livelihood of our turtle farmers who have been forced instead to sell to unstable foreign markets. A similar provision I authored was passed by the Senate in May, but was stripped by the U.S. House in Conference.
- Designation of the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge as an official USDA Human Nutrition Center. This designation will help provide more resources to advance the internationally renowned work the Center is doing.
- Redefining essential acres in the Commodity Reserve Program to target wetland and buffer areas to absorb nitrogen run-off that continues to increase the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico. If the hypoxic zone continues to increase, Louisiana's fishing industry may suffer from depleted stocks.
- An amendment to improve technical and infrastructure and quality of rural health care facilities.

As the bill moves forward, I will continue to monitor it, ensuring that the bill the

President receives maintains the smart and cost-effective programs our farmers depend on. In the future, I look forward to working with you as I know your background as a veterinarian and a cattleman will bring expertise and a unique perspective to this position.

Again, congratulations on your election. Commissioner Odom was an effective and tireless advocate for our farmers and rural communities. I am positive you will continue much of his good work. Please feel free to contact me anytime to discuss matters important to Louisiana.

With warmest regards, I am

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu  
United States Senator

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